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Training Gives Farmer New Start

USAID projects like AVIPA Plus train Afghan farmers in the latest agricultural techniques



Photo credit: IRD/AVIPA Plus

“Poppy took my sons away from me. They used to smoke it in secret and neglected the land and the family. I will never plant a single sapling of poppy again.”

— Abdul Baqi, farmer and father of four sons, Hilmand Province

Abdul Baqi comes from a long line of poppy farmers. He learned poppy cultivation from his father and passed on the knowledge to his four sons. It was the crop of choice for farmers in the southern Afghan province of Hilmand because it was easy to grow and profitable to sell. But poppy farming has a dark side as Baqi discovered when all four of his sons began smoking opium. They neglected their wives and children, and soon the farm began to suffer.

When Coalition Forces pushed the Taliban out of the area in the summer of 2010, the poppy traders also left, dealing a deathblow to the local poppy economy. For Baqi, it was an opportunity to make a fresh start on his farm. However, he knew little about growing grains and vegetables, and his crop yields were too low to sustain Baqi’s large family.

Then he participated in a USAID project that offers training for local farmers in the latest agricultural techniques and provides high-yielding seeds and quality fertilizers at a reduced price. The training gave Baqi a foundation in planting, harvesting, and marketing his crops—skills that had been lost through generations of poppy farming. Baqi received vouchers for melons, radishes, tomatoes, and other vegetables, paying only 35 percent of the market price. He also received 150 kg of fertilizer and attended classes where he learned how to apply the fertilizer in proper doses.

Now his fields are flourishing. He plants the seeds in rows, weeds them out regularly, and irrigates the plants with just the right quantity of water. His harvest output has already doubled. Baqi says that he is proud to show his neighbors how to grow crops other than poppy. Moreover, his sons quit drugs and are back to their land and family.

“This is my second chance as a farmer and a father,” Baqi said. “I could have lost my sons to poppy. Now I have my sons back and the land is feeding us all.”

USAID’s Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) Plus project is providing farmers like Baqi the knowledge and resources to build stronger farms. It is also providing incentives to help poppy farmers produce licit crops, creating a more stable Afghan society.